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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Israel/Lebanon, Palestinian
Territories, Iraq (7/24)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers continued to report on the tense situation in South Lebanon. All papers featured a statement by Dr. Mohsen Bilal, Minister of Information, to Spanish daily "ABC" that "Syria will not sit tight if Israeli ground troops enter Lebanon and approach Syria. If Israel invades Lebanon on the ground and comes near us, threatening our national security, Syria will not sit tight." Bilal criticized the US Secretary of State's announcement that the US rejects a cease-fire, saying, "It is an unjustified act by the US not to work for a cease-fire, waiting for Israel to completely destroy Lebanon and evacuate the Lebanese people." Bilal added, "Israel would not be the only player in the region. Syria has always worked for a just and comprehensive peace that secures Israeli withdrawal from all occupied territories, including the occupied Golan, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital." He depicted as "extremely cordial" the recent talks he held in Spain with Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos. "Those talks focused on the dangerous situation resulting from the hideous Israeli aggression against Lebanon and the need for an immediate cease-fire and prisoner swap," Bilal said. "Spain and Syria are working hard for a cease-fire; Syria is ready to cooperate with Spanish efforts in this regard." Syrian papers also reported that Foreign Minister Walid al-Mouallem received Horst Fraytagh, Commissioner of the Near East and Middle East at the German Foreign Ministry. Mouallem said that "Syria backs international efforts to reach a just and comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli struggle on the basis of UN Security Council resolutions and the land-for-peace formula." The commissioner expressed Germany's deep concern about the dangerous developments in the region, saying that Germany is working hard to bring about a cease-fire and a comprehensive settlement.

Syrian Foreign Minister Mouallem also received a phone call from Celso Luiz Nunes Amorim, Foreign Minister of Brazil, who expressed Brazil's deep concern over the recent dangerous developments in the region, confirming full solidarity with Syria and Lebanon and thanking Syria for facilitating the evacuation of Brazilian nationals from Lebanon.

End of summary.

¶2. Selected Headlines:

"In a statement to Spanish Daily "ABC," Information Minister Bilal reiterates Syria's support of a cease-fire and prisoner swap in Lebanon: Syria will not stand by with arms folded if Israeli ground troops enter Lebanon and approach Syria" (Government-owned Tishreen, 7/24)

"Foreign Minister al-Mouallem receives a phone call from Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Luiz Nunes Amorim and clarifies to German envoy Horst Fraytagh: Syria supports a cease-fire and giving a chance for diplomatic efforts" (Government-owned Tishreen, 7/24)

"Israel paves the way for the US project. The Olmert government acknowledges inability to curb national resistance and threatens to launch a long-range war to destroy the infrastructure. More than a hundred missiles fired at occupied northern Palestine" (Government-owned Tishreen, 7/24)

"A general strike is observed in Palestine protesting the visit of US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. The national resistance continues firing missiles at Israel in response to Israeli massacres" (Government-owned Tishreen, 7/24)

"Hundreds of Iraqis killed or injured in Baghdad and Kirkuk" (Government-owned Tishreen, 7/24)

"The US army encourages torture of Iraqi prisoners" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 7/24)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"The Secrets behind Rice's Visit"

Ahmad Dawwa, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, commented (7/24): "The American support for Lebanon and its government became clear before the arrival of US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to the region. This support is taking the form of laser-guided bombs presented to Israel to allow it to destroy what its military machine has so far been unable to flatten throughout Lebanon.

"This is beyond imagination: While Israeli planes and artillery are spreading destruction, death, and horror across Lebanon, using US weapons and leaning on US support, Rice is talking about support for Al-Saniora's young democratic government in Lebanon. It is as if those who are martyred and displaced and those who see their homes burned had nothing to do with Lebanon!

"Naturally, Rice's upcoming visit comes not to pressure Israel into stopping its aggression or finding a political solution, but to impose Israeli conditions on Lebanon. The US support for continuing aggression is a blatant expression of the Bush administration's interest in and concern about Lebanon's democracy and future.

"To know the real secrets behind Rice's visit, we should think of the Israeli assessments of the results of the aggression on Lebanon. These assessments generally assert that none of the military and political objectives that Israel hoped to achieve from this dirty war has been achieved. This risks a government crisis in Israel. The American intervention, therefore, was essential to cover the Israeli failure by escalating the international and regional pressure on the Lebanese resistance and recruiting parties in Lebanon to accuse the resistance of destroying the country and incite the public against it. But it appears that the Bush administration has not learned the lessons of the past. It insists on accumulating its failures in the region.

"One cannot blame the US for its hostile position toward Lebanon and the region. Its political and military power is dedicated to

Israel's interests. What causes outrage and astonishment, however, is the defeatism of some Arab parties and their willingness to facilitate Rice's mission and, consequently, find a solution to the Israeli predicament at the expense of the Lebanese people.

"The political battle is not less important than the military battle. Those Arabs who, through their statements, have provided cover for the war, must realize this fact.... They are not required to support the resistance, as this is an unattainable dream. But they should, at least, remain neutral in order to preserve the security and stability of the region."

"We Hope it Is Untrue"

Izz-al-Din al-Darwish, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (7/24): "It is not surprising that the United States is more enthusiastic about the war on Lebanon than Olmert's government itself is.... What is surprising is the reports that some Lebanese parties participating in the government, as well as many Arab countries, are not willing to see the Israeli aggression end at this time; they want the aggression to continue until the final elimination of the Lebanese national resistance...."

"We hope that these reports are not true.... It has become crystal clear that the aim of the Israeli attacks against Lebanon is to kill Lebanese people and destroy their infrastructure, not to obtain the release of the two captured soldiers...."

"Rice's Roughness"

Maha Sultan, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (7/24): "Condoleezza Rice's statements on the Lebanese crisis lacked any human feelings toward the suffering of the Lebanese people under Israel's massacres and terrorism...."

"Rice's statements on the eve of her visit to the region promise the Lebanese people that the massacre will continue and promise the region a new map Washington entrusted Israel to draw with blood and fire.... Rice's statements lack the minimum level of diplomacy...."

"The United States no longer needs to be diplomatic in the way it handles the region because the countries of the region have reached such a level of cowardice and defeatism that they can only take orders and fully comply with them...."

"Partnership of Illusion and Aggression"

Ali Nasrallah, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (7/24): "The partnership between Washington and Tel Aviv in the aggression against Lebanon is evident in US statements and media reports...."

"This partnership proves that the open war on Lebanon was a premeditated plan that was awaiting the zero hour for implementation, to realize strategic objectives in Lebanon.... The capture of the two Israeli soldiers was used only as a pretext to implement the plan, which seeks to compensate for the US failure in Iraq...."

"Israeli Aggression against Lebanon"

Dr. Sa'id Musallam, a columnist in government-owned Al-Thawra, maintained (7/24): "Israel will not be able to achieve any of the objectives of its military campaign in Lebanon.... Israel will not be able, in any way, to crush the Lebanese resistance, because this resistance is not stationed in specific positions, nor is it a faction without a popular base. The resistance is a people, a land, and a creed. And above all, it is the plan of the nation's awakening and challenge to its enemy in the battle for existence...."

"Israel will be forced to admit defeat.... Israel cannot invade Lebanese territory. If it does, it will return defeated, pulling out thousands of bodies. The international community will intervene and take measures and adopt resolutions forcing the resistance to allow Israel to pull the bodies of its soldiers out of the battlefield...."

"No to Terje Roed-Larsen"

Imad Fawzi al-Shu'aybi, a Syrian strategic analyst, wrote an op-ed in government-owned Al-Ba'th on (7/24) saying: "Syria has refused to receive Terje Roed-Larsen, member of the delegation that the United Nations sent to the region to discuss the Lebanese crisis...."

"Contrary to some Western claims, Syria did not refuse to receive the entire delegation, but put a veto on Roed-Larsen, which resulted in the delegation canceling the visit.... Syria has the right, as a sovereign state, to receive whomever it wants and to reject whomever it wants...."

"Roed-Larsen is persona non grata in Syria because in his missions in the region as envoy of the UN secretary general he always wanted to serve Israel at the expense of Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestinians.... Roed-Larsen is the engineer of Resolution 1559 and the one who claimed in his reports to the Security Council that Syria continued to interfere in Lebanese affairs after the withdrawal of the Syrian army from Lebanon, and who called for the demarcation of the border between Syria and Lebanon and for the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries."

"He is not a mediator. He cannot be a mediator. He does not meet the conditions that a mediator must meet. He is a party par excellence. The message that Syria sent when it refused to receive him is clear, because he cannot be a mediator: We will not receive an Israeli! Send somebody else, or let the delegation come without him.... Syria's role in the region cannot be ignored...."

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